

Message Text

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16

ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1578

INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC HONOLULU

COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 12258

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, JA

SUBJECT: THE NEW CHALLENGE TO PRIMIN MIKI

SUMMARY: WHAT AMOUNTS TO A SECOND DETERMINED EFFORT TO
UNSEAT PRIMIN MIKI, LED BY DEPUTY PRIMIN FUKUDA, HAS
ALREADY SUCCEEDED IN SHARPLY DIVIDING THE RULING LDP
AND PLACING MIKI IN SERIOUS DANGER. WHILE THE EFFORT
IS BOUND TO SUCCEED IN TIME, WHAT THE FUKUDA EFFORT
CONSPICUOUSLY LACKS IS A READILY COMPREHENSIBLE REASON
FOR MIKI'S OUSTER AT THIS PARTICULAR JUNCTURE. MIKI
STILL ENJOYS THE LEVERAGE OF A PRIME MINISTER AND
CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC SUPPORT LINKED TO HIS PLEDGE OF A
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THOROUGH LOCKHEED PROBE. IN ADDITION, THERE IS THE

UNSPOKEN--AND WE BELIEVE UNLIKELY--THREAT THAT MIKI MIGHT BOLT THE LDP. THE FUKUDA FORCES ARE THUS WILLING TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION WITH MIKI AND ARE CONCENTRATING THEIR FIRE NOT ON MIKI, BUT ON HIS MAIN ALLY, LDP SEC GEN NAKASONE.

BOTH SIDES WILL SEEK TO IMPROVE THEIR POSITIONS DURING A SERIES OF SCHEDULED LDP CONFABS NEXT WEEK. AFTER THAT, MIKI AND FUKUDA WILL TALK AGAIN, WITH A SHOWDOWN NOW EXPECTED DURING THE LATTER PART OF AUGUST. WE ESTIMATE THE PRESENT ODDS OF MIKI'S SURVIVING THROUGH THE GENERAL ELECTION AT 50-50, BUT THE TIDE IS RUNNING IN FUKUDA'S FAVOR. NEW LOCKHEED DEVELOPMENTS COULD, HOWEVER, SLOW, SKEW--OR DECIDE--THE CONTEST AT ANY TIME. END SUMMARY.

1. A NEW DETERMINED EFFORT TO UNSEAT PRIMIN MIKI IS NOW UNDERWAY. SPURRED BY THE TANAKA ARREST, IT IS LED BY DEPUTY PRIMIN FUKUDA WITH THE STRONG SUPPORT OF FINMIN OHIRA AND THE VENGEANCE-MINDED TANAKA FACTION. THE CHALLENGE IS FAVORED BY THE JAPANESE ESTABLISHMENT. FULLY TWO-THIRDS OF THE RULING CONSERVATIVE PARTY (INCLUDING THE PARTY ELDERS), A MAJORITY OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND THE BUREAUCRACY. IT IS MUCH MORE BROADLY BASED THAN THE MAY/JUNE ATTEMPT TO TOPPLE MIKI. IT SEEMS INEVITABLE THAT THE EFFORT WILL SUCCEED BEFORE LONG, BUT THE CHALLENGE LACKS A PLAUSIBLE REASON, READILY UNDERSTANDABLE TO THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC FOR UNSEATING MIKI AT JUST THIS TIME.

2. THE FUKUDA-LED CAMPAIGN HAS ALREADY SUCCEEDED IN SHARPLY DIVIDING THE LDP AND PLACING MIKI IN SERIOUS DANGER. DESPITE THIS, HOWEVER, HE STILL HAS IMPORTANT ADVANTAGES. FIRST AND FOREMOST IS THE UNFINISHED LOCKHEED PROBE AND DEMONSTRATED PUBLIC AND MEDIA SUPPORT FOR HIS COMPLETION OF THAT INVESTIGATION. AS PRIME MINISTER, HE HAS THE ADVANTAGES OF AN INCUMBENT. ON THE DEFENSIVE, HE HAS SHOWN HIMSELF TO BE A SKILLFUL FIGHTER. THERE IS ALSO THE IMPLICIT POSSIBILITY OF HIS BOLTING THE LDP--IMMEDIATELY ENDANGERING ITS MAJORITY--IF PUSHED TOO HARD. (WHILE THIS POSSIBILITY MUST BE WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE, WE DO NOT BELIEVE IT LIKELY.) FINALLY, LOCKHEED
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ARRESTS AFFECTING THE CHALLENGERS' RANKS WOULD BE UNSETTLING.

3. BUT MIKI HAS AN OBVIOUS WEAK POINT: HIS MAIN ALLY, LDP SEC GEN NAKASONE. FOR WEEKS NAKASONE'S NAME APPEARED ON AND OFF IN THE PRESS (PARTICULARLY ASAHI) LINKED TO KODAMA'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE LOCKHEED SCANDAL. THIS WEEK IT WAS BROUGHT UP IN DIET COMMITTEES ON TWO SEPARATE

OCCASIONS. FINANCIAL IRREGULARITIES ATTRIBUTED TO HIS FACTION HAVE BEEN UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR SOME MONTHS. HE IS WIDELY DISTRUSTED BY THE LEADERSHIP OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES AND WIDELY DISLIKED WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY. SINCE BY JAPANESE TRADITION NAKASONE'S DOWNFALL WOULD BRING MIKI WITH HIM, MIKI'S OPPONENTS ARE CONCENTRATING THEIR FIRE ON NAKASONE FOR TACTICAL REASONS.

4. MOST HERE AGREE THAT THE NEXT TWO TO THREE WEEKS ARE LIKELY TO DETERMINE THE OUTCOME OF THE CURRENT CHALLENGE. MIKI, USING THE ONGOING LOCKHEED INVESTIGATION, IS PLAYING FOR TIME. HE HOPES BEFORE THE LOCKHEED INVESTIGATION IS OFFICIALLY OVER TO CONVENE AN EXTRAORDINARY DIET SESSION LEADING TO DISSOLUTION AND ELECTION. FUKUDA AND OHIRA, ON THE OTHER HAND, ARE NOW CLEARLY TRYING TO FORCE THE ISSUE. THE MIKI MEETINGS WITH FUKUDA AND OHIRA (TOKYO 12161) ENDED IN DISAGREEMENT BUT THE DOOR IS OPEN TO FURTHER BARGAINING SESSIONS ON THE TERMS AND TIMING OF A POSSIBLE MIKI RESIGNATION.

5. NEXT WEEK WILL BRING A SERIES OF SCHEDULED PARTY CONFABS: LDP SENIORS (THOSE WITH MORE THAN 25 YEARS IN THE DIET) ARE SCHEDULED TO MEET AUGUST 16; TWO DAYS LATER, PREFECTURAL LDP CHAIRMEN WILL GATHER IN TOKYO; AND THE PARTY LEADERSHIP IS SCHEDULED TO MEET AUGUST 19-20 WITH DIET MEMBERS GROUPED BY INCOMING CLASS. BOTH MIKI AND FUKUDA WILL SEEK TO USE THESE MEETINGS TO BOLSTER THEIR POSITIONS AND ANOTHER PERIOD OF REASSESSMENT ON BOTH SIDES IS LIKELY AT THEIR CONCLUSION. THE FOLLOWING WEEK (OF AUGUST 23) WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BRING A NEW AND PERHAPS FINAL ROUND OF TALKS.

6. NEARLY EVERYONE HERE AGREES THAT THE FUKUDA FORCES,
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SOONER OR LATER, WILL PREVAIL. BUT, THAT SAID, THOSE STANDING SOMEWHAT APART FROM THE BATTLE BELIEVE MIKI HAS A REASONABLE CHANCE OF SURMOUNTING DEMANDS FOR IMMEDIATE RESIGNATION. OUR OWN BEST ESTIMATE OF MIKI'S CHANCES OF SURVIVING UNTIL THE GENERAL ELECTION IS ABOUT 50-50 WITH THE TIDE RUNNING IN FUKUDA'S FAVOR. THE PROSPECT IS FOR ADDITIONAL BARGAINING AS THE INTRA-PARTY BATTLE CONTINUES WITH PRESSURE BUILDING FOR MIKI TO NAME THE DAY HE WILL STEP DOWN. WE ADD THE STANDARD "SAVINGS CLAUSE" OF ALL COMMENTATORS, OURSELVES INCLUDED: "FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LOCKHEED INVESTIGATION COULD SLOW, SKEW, OR DETERMINE THE COURSE OF THE PRESENT CHALLENGE TO MIKI ON ANY GIVEN DAY."
SHOESMITH

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